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Abstract

I am interested in macro-photography, particularly in the ways that natural objects or substances, when viewed at close range, are transformed into intriguing abstract patterns or conjure unfamiliar worlds. My favourite subjects for this are bark, sand, rock and snow, and, to a lesser degree, flowers and fruit. The colours, textures and shapes of the everyday things we take for granted or simply pass without noticing can become fascinatingly alive.

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Forbidden Fruit (and Vegies)

I am interested in macro-photography, particularly in the ways that natural objects or substances, when viewed at close range, are transformed into intriguing abstract patterns or conjure unfamiliar worlds. My favourite subjects for this are bark, sand, rock and snow, and, to a lesser degree, flowers and fruit. The colours, textures and shapes of the everyday things we take for granted or simply pass without noticing can become fascinatingly alive. For me, the experience of a kind of an existential dislocation produced through detail revealed by alteration in the size of objects (and through lighting and framing) relativises our anthropocentric apprehensions, reminding us of our own perceptual limitations. Even within our homes and gardens, the world is experienced (and no doubt understood) in ways vastly different from our own, by the millions of living beings with whom we share the planet. (I remember the astonishment, and for some, the horror, at the images revealed by electron microscopy of the alien ‘wild life’ ever present on human skin; that bees ‘see’ a field of flowers in a very different way from humans has long been remarked.)

The alteration in scale afforded by the electron microscope (or just a macro-lens) does not always transform all ‘ordinary’ objects into something extraordinary, but together with lighting, the alteration in scale defamiliarises so that we see some things, literally, in a new light. I enjoy taking close-up pictures of fruit and vegetables using sunlight and various artificial lights to accentuate colour, to give mandarin or orange quarters for example, unexpected refulgence. The rough texture and ‘ropey’ patterns of rock melon skin — each one subtly different — can reveal in close up anything from a pattern of dolphins dancing to a simple design of rectangles. A slightly unripe tomato slice suggests the soft vulnerability of mouth tissue, while a magnified section of corn cob emerges as the yellowing human teeth that will eat it. Some fruit and vegetable close-ups, without offering specific correspondences to human anatomy, are nevertheless redolent of the body which eats them and which they will in fact become. The cliché ‘we are what we eat’ has, like all clichés, a degree of real truth, or in terms of more recent ecological discourse, such similitudes as macro-photography can produce remind us of the *processive* nature of being, in spite of our determined separation of the world into discrete objects and substances.

I am drawn to macro-photography — as I am to literature — by the transformative mystery and power of the metaphoric process. In photography, however, the play of difference and similarity in which metaphor consists is energised not by language, but by light and by the small made large or the large, small.



















Green Leafy Curry

My mother always hated cooking, particularly because the obligation to cook food took her away from the garden where she preferred to spend her time. She regretted not living into the twenty-first century, in which, she firmly believed, there would be pills we could just take with water (and perhaps chocolate) and get back out to the garden, cooking having been eliminated. For her, however, it still had to be done, and meals were traditionally English (meat and three veges with the hell boiled out of them) even if colonially filtered through that Australian culinary bible, the *W.M.U. Cookbook*. The *W.M.U. Cookbook*'s instructions were a peculiar mixture of the risibly elementary and the sweepingly assumptive, from the almost 'how to boil an egg' (for the completely clueless) to cake recipes with no measures of ingredients and no indication of cooking times — a practice which called for experience, judgement and straws from a broom.

I have long given up English 'cuisine' for Indian, Italian and Thai; and I love buying recipe books in India (or Italy) that have been designed for a local market (in India particularly these are often in English to cater for different local language readers) just as the *W.M.U. Cookbook* was. The following recipe comes from my 'bible', a tiny paperback on South Indian cooking I bought in Bangalore. It did not of course call for tinned coconut milk or desiccated coconut, and was unspecific in terms of amount. I have adapted it for those unfortunate enough not to have a real coconut (if you do, this really does taste better) and those who like ingredient amounts and cooking times specified. It's quick and easy to make though, and of that my mother would certainly have approved.

INGREDIENTS

4 cups spinach (or other green leafy vegetable)
 ½ can coconut milk (or coconut cream)
 2 dessertspoons (or more to taste) desiccated coconut
 2 heaped teaspoons mustard seed
 4 heaped teaspoons urad dhal
 chillies to taste
 ¾ teaspoon salt (or to taste)
 2 teaspoons tumeric

METHOD

1. Fry the mustard seed and urad dhal in oil till the mustard seed crackles and the dhal gently browns.
2. Add spinach (or any green leafy vegetable), chillies, tumeric, salt, coconut milk and coconut. Stir.
3. Simmer with lid on pot for 15 minutes.